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Official Records

18th plenary meeting
Thursday, 2 October 2008, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Yáñez-Barnuevo (Spain), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

High-level plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action

Agenda item 52 (*continued*)

Groups of countries in special situations

(b) Specific actions related to the particular needs and problems of landlocked developing countries: outcome of the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation

Report of the Secretary-General (A/63/165)

Draft resolution (A/63/L.3*)

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Thongloung Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Sisoulith (Lao People's Democratic Republic): On behalf of the Lao delegation, I congratulate the President of the Assembly on his election to preside over this important forum.

I also commend Ambassador Yukio Takasu of Japan for the efficient manner in which he facilitated the negotiations on the outcome document of this meeting.

We thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his comprehensive report on the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action. We feel pleased with the progress made thus far. The special problems and needs of landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) have been widely recognized, and greater attention and resources have been given by regional and global multilateral and development institutions to the establishment of efficient transit systems.

Yet more remains to be done for the Almaty Programme of Action to be made a reality. In that regard, further actions are required to accelerate the process of establishing viable and predictable transit systems through the promotion of regional and subregional cooperative arrangements, closer cooperation between LLDCs and their neighbours, transit policy reforms and trade facilitation measures. It is also important to provide greater market access for goods originating from LLDCs.

Despite some progress, the economic growth and social well-being of LLDCs remain very vulnerable to external shocks and the multiple challenges facing the international community: financial instability, global economic slow-down, hikes in food and fuel prices and the impact of climate change. The LLDCs continue to be marginalized from the international trading system due to their high transaction costs, which prevent them from maximizing the use of trade as an instrument for achieving their development goals.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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The draft declaration will re-energize all stakeholders to do more towards the fulfilment of their respective commitments, as called for in the Almaty Programme of Action.

Since its adoption, the Programme of Action has been translated into the development strategies of the Lao Government. The National Transport Committee, under the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, was established as a monitoring and reporting mechanism. Strategically located in the heart of the emerging Greater Mekong Subregion, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has upheld its firm commitment to actively participate in the subregional and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) economic cooperation frameworks.

To reap benefits from regional and subregional cooperation programmes while promoting trade, investment and tourism, the Government is pursuing a policy of gradual transformation from a landlocked to a land-linked nation, with priorities given to the development of the road transport network and regional and international linkages, including railway links and road maintenance and rehabilitation.

At the third summit of the leaders of the Greater Mekong Subregion, held in Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic, in March 2008, the leaders of our six countries adopted a Joint Summit Declaration and the Vientiane Plan of Action for Greater Mekong Subregion development from 2008 to 2012 under the theme "Enhancing competitiveness through greater connectivity".

Our leaders reaffirmed their commitment to fostering closer subregional linkages. They also pledged to accelerate the construction and improvement of the remaining sections of subregional corridors and to expand the corridor network through multimodal linkages, including the Singapore-Kunming rail link.

To conclude, the Lao People's Democratic Republic reaffirms its unwavering commitment to continue to cooperate with other fellow LLDCs and its transit neighbours in the follow-up to the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

We sincerely thank all donors for the generous aid they have provided to us over the past years. Yet, with its limited capacity as a landlocked least developed country, the Lao People's Democratic Republic hopes to receive increased support and assistance from the donor community, including the United Nations system.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Phandu T. C. Skalemani, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Botswana.

Mr. Skalemani (Botswana): Botswana welcomes the convening of this high-level plenary meeting to review progress in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action for landlocked developing countries.

I thank the Secretary-General for a comprehensive and informative report on the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action. I also acknowledge the important work of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States in its instrumental role of coordination and advocacy of the development agenda of those groups of countries in special situations.

This meeting is very timely, especially as it takes place shortly after the high-level meetings on the development needs of Africa and the review of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The effective implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, which is one of the crucial enablers for the attainment of the Goals, will open up opportunities for trade, economic growth and development.

The Almaty Programme of Action, adopted by the Assembly in August 2003, was the first comprehensive global strategy to address the special needs of, and challenges facing, landlocked developing countries. It recognized the constraints posed by lack of efficient transit transport routes and the associated high costs of land transportation, which have a negative impact on both the competitiveness of exports of landlocked countries and access to imported goods. Botswana is doing its part to implement the Almaty Programme of Action.

Botswana lies at the centre of the southern African plateau and is surrounded by four countries, with the nearest seaport being approximately 762 kilometres away. Our geographical location puts us

at a disadvantage with regard to access to cheaper means of transportation.

Though landlocked, we are a key transit route, with a responsibility to facilitate the smooth and efficient flow of the transit of goods. We take this responsibility seriously, as demonstrated by the programmes we have undertaken at the national level, bilaterally with our neighbours and within the framework of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

We take a large amount of transit traffic from south to north as well as from east to west. The Walvis Bay corridor, or trans-Kalahari corridor, runs through the western part of Botswana, linking Namibia, Botswana and South Africa, while the Durban-Lubumbashi corridor traverses a section of Botswana, connecting us with Zambia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa.

In this context, Botswana envisages the creation of one-stop border posts in order to address delays at the border. These posts will benefit the adjoining countries in terms of reduced transport costs and transit time.

Botswana highly appreciates the assistance, support and cooperation it receives from transit and coastal neighbouring States. It is most gratifying that Botswana's imports and exports go through our neighbours' roads, railways and ports unhindered. It therefore follows that any assistance extended to coastal and transit States in the development of efficient transport infrastructure is crucial to the trade routes of landlocked countries. In that regard, ongoing efforts to intensify economic cooperation and regional interaction deserve increased financial and technical support.

As a developing country, Botswana imports most of its production inputs, which, for an economy like ours, dominated by mining activity, amounts to a large volume of equipment annually. It is therefore vital that we secure efficient transport routes and services to facilitate the movement of goods. Botswana therefore attaches great importance to bilateral and regional arrangements to simplify, harmonize and standardize rules on transport and transit so as to minimize trade costs and make our products competitive in international markets.

It is the view of my delegation that there is an urgent need to strengthen and harmonize initiatives and programmes of regional economic communities, the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and development banks, in order to achieve proper synergy and coordination in their operations, so as to complement the Almaty Programme of Action.

Assistance for the rehabilitation of existing transport infrastructure is critical. That would ensure viability of transport corridors and sustained economic spin-offs for communities residing along those corridors.

In order to further facilitate the speedy and efficient flow of trade, Botswana is currently undertaking expansion of the Sir Seretse Khama International Airport in Gaborone. The airport will be able to accommodate bigger aircraft, which will enable the transportation of large volumes of goods.

Botswana's classification as a middle-income country presents some challenges, as we cannot access development assistance from donor agencies. The unique circumstances of landlocked countries in terms of infrastructure development should therefore be taken into account, as they present serious capacity constraints. As a result, achievement of the objectives of the Almaty Programme of Action will continue to be a challenge. However, we shall endeavour to live up to our commitments in partnership and collaboration with our neighbouring countries.

In conclusion, I once again reiterate our commitment to the Almaty Programme of Action, which, if fully implemented, will enhance trade opportunities for Botswana and indeed promote equitable development of the SADC region as a whole.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Simon Ejua, Minister of State for Works and Transport of the Republic of Uganda.

Mr. Ejua (Uganda): It is a great honour for me to be here today to participate in this review meeting of the Almaty Programme of Action. As a landlocked developing country (LLDC), Uganda welcomes the opportunity to take part.

The peculiar challenges faced by landlocked developing countries due to the lack of territorial and international access to the sea and international waterways limit their scope for effective participation

in international trade. They therefore require the cooperation and collaboration of their neighbouring transit countries to overcome the challenges they face.

The Almaty Programme of Action, which provides a global framework for cooperation between landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries, is accordingly an essential component in their development agenda. It is also an important effort to effectively deal with the specialized requirements and challenges facing landlocked developing countries and further their integration into regional economic communities and their partnerships.

We in Uganda believe that the review of the Almaty Programme of Action will provide solutions to the challenges currently facing landlocked countries.

The Almaty Programme of Action provides a worldwide framework for the creation of appropriate transit transport systems in landlocked, transit developing and small island developing countries, recognizing that valid solutions need an integrated approach so that the challenges and problems faced by those countries can be transformed into opportunities.

As everyone present knows, inadequate infrastructure is a major obstacle to establishing efficient transit transport systems in both landlocked and transit developing countries. Addressing those needs will involve considerable investment, the setting up of public-private partnerships, capacity-building and new policies and institutional reforms where necessary. That calls for closer collaboration between the landlocked and transit developing countries and their partners to provide additional financial resources and capacity-building assistance.

Road transport is the main mode of transport for the imports and exports of landlocked developing countries. Sizeable resource allocations are required for the expansion and maintenance of road transit infrastructure.

The key challenges facing international road transport are aged vehicles, overloading of vehicles, worsening road safety, the absence of social infrastructure along transit corridors, cumbersome clearance procedures and poor road maintenance. Subregional and regional infrastructure development plans should give high priority to transit corridors linking landlocked developing countries to the transport networks of transit developing countries and regional networks.

Railways play an important role in the transit transport corridor systems linking ocean ports with landlocked developing countries. Major concerns include the persistent problem of the limited availability of equipment, including locomotives and wagons, and poor maintenance standards. The actions required include the construction of new railway connections and the rehabilitation of existing railway facilities as a matter of priority, in conjunction with the new technological improvements and innovations being examined.

The efficiency of port operations depends on adequate infrastructure and good management. Many seaports are critical bottlenecks in transit systems because of a range of physical inadequacies and operational constraints, which include poor handling and storage facilities for transit cargo, cumbersome procedures for the clearing and release of cargo, congestion and a shortage of skilled manpower.

Landlocked and transit developing countries should seek cooperative arrangements to improve port facilities and services for transit goods, including the modernization of existing terminals, the establishment of new ones and the simplification of procedures where appropriate.

Inland waterways provide transit services to some landlocked developing countries. The efficiency of transit services along such waterways requires better infrastructure, appropriate legal frameworks to govern navigational operations on rivers and lakes and more effective environmental and safety measures. Further efforts should be made to rehabilitate and expand lake and river infrastructure facilities along corridors linking landlocked developing countries to ocean ports.

Pipelines provide a cost-effective means of transport for both oil and natural gas. The planning and construction of pipelines requires close cooperation between landlocked and transit developing countries. The substantive investments required for the construction of pipelines also necessitate capital investment from the private sector. Landlocked and transit developing countries should cooperate and coordinate to construct pipelines along the most effective and most suitable or shortest routes, taking into account the interests of the parties concerned.

I am confident that this meeting, having taken stock of the progress achieved so far and of the outstanding challenges, will come up with recommendations on tangible actions and deliverables to enhance the implementation of the Almaty Programme, for the beneficial integration of landlocked and transit countries in the global trading system.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Adviser in Charge of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): On behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, as its chair, I begin by commending the President for the holding of this high-level meeting for landlocked developing countries.

The Secretary-General and his High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States deserve our praise for their substantive contributions to this event.

The challenges that landlocked countries face are enormous. The least developed landlocked countries are the worst off. In a highly competitive world, landlocked developing countries face severe constraints because of their narrow export base, lack of access to the sea, distance from major international markets, inadequate transport infrastructure and cumbersome transit procedures. They still face insurmountable challenges in integrating their economies into the world market.

Landlocked developing countries are also highly vulnerable to external shocks, which are painfully amplified by the number of new and emerging challenges. The current food crisis, high energy prices, climate change and global warming pose a serious threat to their efforts aimed at the eradication of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, disease and illiteracy and the achievement of other socio-economic goals.

Transit neighbours of LLDCs are mostly developing or emerging economies. They, too, encounter similar economic challenges and scarcities of resources and infrastructure. The special needs and challenges must be addressed comprehensively. Full implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action is critically important. We concur with the Secretary-General that

> "Measures to deal with the transit problems must address inadequate infrastructure, trade imbalance, inefficient transport organization, and weak managerial, procedural, regulatory and institutional systems." (*A/63/165, para. 77*)

Such a comprehensive approach will offer a win-win outcome for both LLDCs and transit neighbours.

We must intensify global efforts to establish viable and predictable transit systems for landlocked and transit countries. The construction, maintenance and improvement of their transport, storage and other transit-related facilities should be ensured.

Official development assistance remains the major source of investment in developing infrastructures in landlocked and transit countries. Development partners should provide adequate financial and technical assistance on a predictable basis to implement transit infrastructure projects in those countries.

Landlocked countries and their transit neighbours must cooperate closely and meaningfully to build efficient transit systems. South-South cooperation, including triangular and regional and subregional cooperation, has become increasingly important in that regard.

In conclusion, let me reiterate the solidarity of the least developed countries with the LLDCs, and Bangladesh's unswerving support for them. We are not an immediate transit country ourselves; rather, we offer transit to two landlocked countries through a third country.

The Government of Bangladesh has always been forthcoming in providing such facilities to landlocked countries of the region. We are in the process of building an uninterrupted road network throughout the country. Developing multimodal transit transport arrangements involving road, railway and waterways entails huge investment. We call upon our development partners to provide adequate support in that regard.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Dora Siliya, Minister of Communications and Transport of the Republic of Zambia.

Ms. Siliya (Zambia): My delegation congratulates the Secretary-General on convening this high-level meeting on the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. As previous speakers have already said, the review provides us with yet another platform to address the immediate and long-term challenges faced by landlocked developing countries.

According to available statistics, sub-Saharan Africa enjoyed a positive and stable balance of trade during 2006 and 2007, with exports contributing an average of 40 per cent to gross domestic product (GDP), while imports contributed 36 per cent in 2006 and 38.8 per cent in 2007.

Similarly, in terms of information and communications technologies development, in 2006 the Internet penetration of the population in Africa stood at 4.7 per cent. In Asia and North America, the figures were 13.7 per cent and 38.7 per cent respectively. Specifically for the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), the Internet penetration in 2006 stood at 2.9 per cent. Clearly, those statistics indicate that Africa's information and communications technologies development is the lowest in the world, representing only 3.4 per cent of the world Internet penetration.

In the case of Zambia, statistics on growth are very favourable, with GDP currently at $10.9 billion, reflecting a 5.5 per cent growth rate and a GDP per capita of $920. However, the available transport and communication infrastructure cannot sustain that growth in the long term. Studies have shown that a mere 10 per cent increase in mobile phone penetration can contribute as much as 2.6 per cent to GDP growth.

The Zambian Government realizes the important role that communication and transport infrastructure play in sustaining economic growth for long-term wealth- and job-creation.

Our immediate challenge is a failure to quickly and adequately respond to the unprecedented levels of economic activity. For example, on our north-south corridor there has been a tremendous increase in cargo transportation, causing a burden on the treasury for road maintenance. That burden is exacerbated by a run-down 1,200-kilometre rail network running alongside the main road network on that corridor.

An estimated $100 million is required to rehabilitate the rail line in the north-south corridor, with another $179 million needed for the Dar es Salaam corridor, which is the Tanzania Zambia Railways Authority (TAZARA) rail line linking Zambia to Tanzania and ultimately to the ports on the east coast of Africa.

As a landlocked country, we are also immediately challenged by the lack of adequate and efficient border facilities, which adversely affects trade facilitation. A good example is again on our north-south corridor, where at any given time over 200 trucks are waiting to be cleared to carry cargo from countries south of Zambia to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On their return trips the trucks are heavily laden with tons of copper.

It is the view of my delegation that at this midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action we should redefine transit countries to include some landlocked countries, such as Zambia, which are carrying heavy amounts of transit cargo to other countries.

Our long-term challenges are numerous, but not insurmountable. We believe that at this review of the Almaty Programme of Action clear guidelines and support must be formulated to assist landlocked and transit developing countries to develop integrated multimodal transport systems.

For example, in Zambia we are currently seeking financing to undertake feasibility studies for TAZARA rail links to the port of Mpulungu on Lake Tanganyika, and we are doing the same to construct a 200-kilometre rail link to Lions Den in Zimbabwe so that we are linked to the shortest possible route to the sea, which is to Beira in Mozambique. Currently, our most popular access to the sea is a distance of just over 3,000 kilometres, to the port of Durban in the Republic of South Africa.

In our effort to continue to facilitate trade and enhance communication, we have so far laid 1,750 kilometres of optic fibre at a cost of $48 million. Our aim is to lay another 10,000 kilometres of optic fibre nationwide by 2015.

As a landlocked country surrounded by eight neighbours, we realize that we have to work with the region and the private sector to enhance connectivity and maximize returns on investment in communication and transport infrastructure. A recent study estimates that the infrastructure required in East and Southern

Africa will cost at least $40 billion annually. This investment will go towards communication, transport and energy development.

In spite of our efforts to provide the necessary infrastructure to facilitate trade, non-oil-producing landlocked developing countries, such as Zambia, will continue to be challenged by high transport costs, in some cases as much as an extra 50 per cent, due to high world oil prices.

It is critically important that we address the software issues, including institutional and administrative constraints, that continue to challenge our progress. Clear policy implementation must also be supported by an enabling legal and regulatory environment.

The very issues that we are discussing today — communication and transport — have brought the world's communities much closer than ever before, as is well captured in the book "The World Is Flat" by Thomas L. Friedman. This is why it is imperative that our cooperating partners continue to provide all necessary assistance.

For example, in our 2030 vision for Zambia, in which we pledge to transform Zambia from a least developed country to a middle-income country, we see our landlocked geographical position as yet another possibility for communication and transport connectivity in the region and beyond. Developed infrastructure leads to efficiency, thereby creating gains for everyone, including our cooperating partners.

Let me conclude by stating Zambia's hope that at the next review of the Almaty Programme of Action more positive reports on all aspects of implementation will be shared among members of the Programme. That will be possible not only through national efforts, such as good planning aligned to the budget process, but also through the fulfilment of commitments by our cooperating partners.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Upendra Yadav, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.

Mr. Yadav (Nepal): The Almaty Programme of Action, agreed upon five years ago, remains a sound framework for partnership among the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), transit developing countries and the developed partners to overcome the special problems of the LLDCs, which face difficulty due to lack of access to the sea and to global markets. As we meet here for the midterm review of its implementation, we need to do more to ensure effective implementation of all the activities under the Programme of Action.

The report of the Secretary-General shows that both landlocked and transit developing countries have made some progress in implementing specific actions agreed in the Almaty Programme of Action. They have made policy reforms and given priority to transit transport issues. They have engaged in a much stronger development partnership with respect to transport infrastructure development and trade facilitation, as well as aid, debt relief and market access. This has enabled the LLDCs as a group to register a high annual growth rate.

But the segregated data show that different countries are in different stages of achieving implementation. And those landlocked countries emerging from conflict need special attention and support.

My delegation is of the view that we should make a realistic assessment of the progress made, lessons learned and problems encountered in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action and agree on measures to accelerate its implementation. While doing that, we should focus our attention on bridging the gaps in the implementation of the agreed commitments. We should also take into account new challenges posed by climate change, global food and energy crises, and other external shocks of various kinds.

The LLDCs have been unfairly marginalized in the global market due to their geographical disadvantages. They suffer from inadequate infrastructure development, congested transit transport systems, institutional bottlenecks and trade capacity constraints. As a result, their competitive efficiency remains weak and vulnerable. Therefore, with reaffirmation of their right of access to and from the sea and freedom of transit by all means of transport, special programmes need to be developed to upgrade the necessary facilities to ensure those rights.

Increased official development assistance is critical for those countries to finance the development of their infrastructure. We urge the donor community to increase aid to support trade-related public investment

in accordance with the national development needs and priorities of the LLDCs.

International trade and trade facilitation aspects are equally significant to the LLDCs to improve and promote trade as an engine for growth. Poor road and transport conditions, dependence on primary-commodity exports, high transit transport costs and numerous procedural constraints and delays continue to seriously undermine the trade efficiency of the landlocked countries.

We welcome the Aid for Trade initiative of the World Trade Organization and stress the need for more resources, effectively used, to be allocated to that practical initiative in developing trade logistics and trade diversification strategies, as well as in addressing trade adjustment costs.

In spite of global efforts, data suggest that a total of 31 landlocked countries have a mere 0.61 per cent share in world exports, and a 0.57 per cent share in world imports. Given this insignificant participation in international trade, the LLDCs are entitled to adequate special measures and preferential treatment under the multilateral trading system to assure them of fairness and predictability while they explore competitive trading opportunities. The international community should therefore support the LLDCs financially and technologically, in a more predictable and sustainable manner.

Nepal is fully committed to taking all necessary measures at the national level to implement the Almaty Programme of Action. Nepal has been undergoing a process of great political and economic transformation. Our new social and economic programmes are designed to accelerate our socio-economic progress. We also need to undertake a post-conflict reconstruction programme.

We have focused on increasing agricultural productivity, building rural infrastructure, increasing road connectivity and creating a high-growth industrial environment. The Government for its part is implementing various reforms in industrial and trade policies and transport and customs procedures.

We need strong partnerships and adequate resources. At this critical juncture, we call for continued and enhanced support from all our development partners to enable us to fully implement the Almaty Programme of Action within the stipulated time frame.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Nurlan Danenov, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Danenov (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a great honour for me to be here today and to take part in this meeting, which is of great importance to my country.

(*spoke in Russian*)

Let me first express my gratitude to the Office of the High Representative for organizing this meeting and in general for the work of promoting the interests of the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs).

We commend the midterm review preparatory process, during which a number of thematic meetings took place, covering topics which included the transit transport infrastructure in Burkina Faso and trade assistance in Mongolia. There were also three regional United Nations Economic Commission meetings and many other preparatory meetings.

Those meetings, as well as the findings and recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General, provided a good basis for the comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action and the definition of follow-up measures. In that regard, I have to point out the importance of the High-level Investment Forum held yesterday.

It is very important that the outcome document we are to adopt is the result of a common understanding and consensus, which assures us that the meeting will contribute to the successful implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action and to the protection and promotion of the interests of landlocked developing countries.

It is very encouraging that over the last five years landlocked developing countries have made considerable progress in carrying out tasks in accordance with the Almaty Programme of Action.

What is especially important is that the world community has acknowledged the special needs of the inland countries, which must be taken into account. Nevertheless, we must recognize that, despite the notable positive changes, many States in that group

continue to be negatively affected by the factors that impede the development of their economies, and are not adequately involved in the international trade system. The main reasons are well known and are clearly and convincingly set out in the Secretary-General's report.

Kazakhstan makes a strong appeal to the international community to give due attention to the economic vulnerability of landlocked countries, ensure their equal access to world markets and give them comprehensive support to help them overcome the obstacles and problems related to their geographical location.

In that regard, we consider it vital to expedite practical implementation of the recommendations in the Almaty Programme of Action.

Kazakhstan has a clear understanding of the importance of national efforts. The Government is therefore implementing result-oriented work at the national level to develop trade capacity and the transport sector. This work includes modernizing existing facilities, improving the commercial orientation of transportation services and eliminating non-physical barriers to the development of transit shipments.

The major goals and parameters in this field are reflected in the Transport Strategy of Kazakhstan for the period to 2015. It provides for the implementation of about 80 investment projects to construct and upgrade airports, highways and railroads, as well as for the development of seaport infrastructure that is important at the regional and interregional levels. Those projects will cost about $30 billion.

One of the priorities is a large-scale project to establish a Western Europe-Western China highway transit corridor. The length of the Kazakh part of the road, which can be considered one of the Eurasian transport sections, exceeds 2,700 kilometres. The project was supported by Russia, and there are now talks under way with China.

Our country is ready to contribute its own funds alongside those of investors. An important role in this context has been given to a joint venture, the Kazakhstan centre for public-private partnership. Kazakhstan has in general — according to participants in the seventh International Forum "TransEurasia-2008", on the subject of Eurasian transit-development prospects, held recently in Astana — met the basic preconditions for attracting foreign investments in the transport infrastructure.

In this context, I would like to emphasize the importance of attaining effective cooperation of Member States with the regional Commissions. In general, we are satisfied with the participation and contribution of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in implementing big projects which considerably improve the transport infrastructure of the Asian region.

This refers, first, to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network and the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network, which provide for new possibilities to develop agriculture and industry in landlocked developing countries and transit countries in our region.

The ESCAP and ECE joint project for strengthening institutional capacities for development of the interregional land and land-sea transport connections is also very important.

I especially note the significance of implementing transport projects within the frameworks of the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) and the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA). Since 1998 Kazakhstan, as a chairing country on the issue of transport and border-crossing, has been carrying out large-scale activities within the framework of the Project Working Group. Its work ensures the involvement of SPECA countries in harmonizing national laws, resolving the non-physical barriers to trade, and coordinating highways and rail networks within the SPECA region.

At the same time, the United Nations should pay more attention to the countries of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, particularly with regard to the development of transit and transport capacity, due to their increasing role in meeting the challenges of energy and food security in the region.

In this regard, we fully support the initiative of the United Nations Secretariat to establish the joint subregional ESCAP/ECE office for Central Asian countries, and we express our hope that Member States will support Kazakhstan's proposal to host this office in Almaty, which we are convinced would enhance the

coordination of efforts to achieve the development goals in Eurasia.

Given that development of the transport infrastructure is one of the major priorities for inland countries, it must be said that the majority of developing States in this group require financial and technical assistance. In this context, we consider it important that the draft outcome document contain an appeal to donor countries and international organizations and institutions to provide the necessary coordinated technical and financial assistance, in the form of grants and preferential credits, to implement regional and interregional projects in accordance with the Almaty Programme of Action. We express our hope that this call will be duly answered by all those who support the Programme of Action.

In conclusion, I stress that Kazakhstan will continue to actively support the activities of the United Nations and its regional Commissions in promoting the interests of landlocked developing countries, and will take every measure necessary to ensure their effective implementation.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Paul Smit, Deputy Minister of Works and Transport of the Republic of Namibia.

Mr. Smit (Namibia): It is indeed an honour for me to speak at this high-level plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action.

This meeting affords us an opportunity to review the progress we have made since our groundbreaking meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan, five years ago. It also enables us to share experiences, lessons learned, constraints encountered in the process of implementation and possible ways of addressing them, and to reaffirm our commitment to addressing the special needs of landlocked and transit developing countries.

The Namibian delegation associates itself with the statement to be delivered by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The Almaty Declaration places the primary responsibility for establishing effective transit systems squarely on the shoulders of landlocked and transit developing countries. In this regard, my country, Namibia, a transit developing country, in cooperation with landlocked neighbours, has continued to register significant progress in attaining the ideals of the Programme of Action since our meeting in Almaty. Indeed, our transit transport programme started well before the Programme's adoption, through the establishment of transit transport corridor institutions.

The Walvis Bay Corridor Group was established in 2000 to administer and manage the Walvis Bay corridors, consisting of the Trans-Caprivi corridor, which provides road connectivity to Zambia through to Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and through Botswana up to Zimbabwe; the Trans-Kunene corridor, which connects Namibia with southern Angola by both rail and road; and the envisaged Windhoek-Luanda corridor to link the two cities through north-eastern Namibia and south-eastern Angola by road.

The Trans-Kalahari Corridor Secretariat was established in 2005 to complement the Walvis Bay Corridor Group. It is responsible for the management of the Trans-Kalahari corridor, which links Namibia to southern Botswana and to South Africa through the Kalahari highway and further on with Mozambique via the Maputo corridor. Southern corridor networks will ultimately link landlocked countries east to west for Southern Africa.

Further developments in our efforts to implement the Almaty Programme of Action include the following.

A Memorandum of Understanding on the Management and Development of the Trans-Kalahari Corridor was signed in November 2003 by Namibia, Botswana and South Africa.

Namibia has also signed with Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe a memorandum of understanding on the management and development of dry port facilities, for which negotiations on lease agreements are nearing finalization.

Streamlined customs procedures, harmonized axle load limits and border operating times have been introduced on the Trans-Kalahari corridor to accelerate transit transport.

Considerable investment has been made at the port of Walvis Bay by way of, inter alia, upgrading, acquiring modern synchrolift equipment, deepening the port, developing dry dock facilities and making operational upgrades. The port will undergo a further

upgrade costing 1.3 billion Namibian dollars — or US$ 160 million during the period 2009-2012.

The introduction of the one-stop border post concept on our corridors is being investigated, in line with provisions of the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Transport, Communications and Meteorology, and will soon be implemented.

Another feasibility study on the Trans-Caprivi corridor rail line has been launched. It is aimed at facilitating rail connectivity with Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mechanisms are being put in place to erect at the Kasangula confluence point over the Zambezi River a bridge that will eventually link Namibia, Botswana and Zambia.

Discussions are ongoing with the Republic of Botswana on the possibility of linking our rail heads on the Trans-Kalahari corridor, based on the funding pledged by the World Bank.

Weighbridges have been installed on our corridor routes to protect our road infrastructure, and Namibia is in the process of acquiring container scanners in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness at our border posts.

Permit me to register the appreciation of my Government for the cooperation and support that we have been receiving from our neighbouring sister countries in our effort to implement the letter and spirit of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Almaty Declaration, as elaborated in Priority 4 of the Almaty Programme of Action, emphasize the important role that the international community should play in providing substantial official development assistance and other resources to landlocked and transit developing countries.

In spite of the progress made, the following challenges remain to be overcome: scientific and technical human resource development; access to affordable financial resources to the tune of about $200 million to upgrade our rail facilities; and access to affordable financial resources to the tune of about $1 billion to extend Namibia's rail facilities to our borders. Also at stake is a combined distance of about a thousand kilometres within our neighbouring countries of Angola, Botswana and Zambia to have full links.

However, I should like at this juncture to express the gratitude of my Government for the assistance that we continue to receive from a few of our cooperating partners towards the attainment of the ideals of the Almaty Programme of Action. Since 2005 Namibia has benefited from the capacity-building programme facilitated by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Finally, Namibia's commitment and political will in putting in place functional transit transport arrangements deserves complementary financial and technical support from the larger international community. If we are to proceed with the development of an alternative trade route for Southern Africa through the port of Walvis Bay, the development of infrastructure is a necessity, for which we appeal for international support. Addressing the special needs of landlocked and transit developing countries cannot and should not be left to those countries alone, because a boost in international trade will benefit all of us.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on Her Excellency Ms. María Teresa Infante, National Director of Borders and Limits of the State of the Republic of Chile.

Ms. Infante (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Government of Chile is participating enthusiastically in the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. We reaffirm our commitment to its objectives, convinced of the importance of the priorities defined in the Almaty Declaration and Programme of Action.

The Programme provided an important set of concepts and has led our countries to conduct evaluations and identify strategies that give substantive direction to national policies on landlocked developing countries. In pursuing its objectives, we reaffirm the validity of the central purpose of the Programme of Action: establishing partnerships around the Millennium Development Goals from the perspective of landlocked and transit developing countries.

The components of the Goals not only include subjects linked to development in a broad sense and to the reduction of poverty as a general reference point, but are also intended to create responses at the level of international relations and across boundaries. This is to benefit the inhabitants of landlocked and transit developing countries, expand the horizons of those countries and contribute to overcoming existing material and technical limitations.

There are many areas in which the relationships involved are tested and require greater responsibility on the part of States. The Almaty Programme of Action set ambitious objectives. The great majority, and perhaps the most significant, are related to three aspects.

First, the landlocked and transit countries must commit themselves to act cooperatively and with a medium- and long-term perspective. Issues such as seeking and implementing more effective agreements on transport, infrastructure, debt and market access should not be viewed solely in the context of economic relations, but should also include other types of relationships involving not just assistance, but also cooperation, trade and development.

The second aspect is the need to strengthen the capacities to mobilize financial and human resources and to make sustainable policies benefiting landlocked developing countries, always taking into account their relationships with transit developing countries and the ability to promote effective coordination between them.

Thirdly, the following policies would help to bring about a sustainable reduction of vulnerabilities: giving appropriate priority to internal mechanisms that contribute to governance, in order to promote the partnership between landlocked and transit developing countries; integrating the business sector and private sector and civil society initiatives; and mobilizing national resources within the framework of agreed national and international policies. Such an approach would complement the efforts being made in other forums at the regional and global levels.

Exercise of the right of access from and to the sea, and freedom of transit in accordance with international law, enshrined in a series of international treaties, as well as the legitimate interests of transit countries based on their sovereign rights, constitute an important reference point founded on international law. It is one that my country fully adheres to.

In that context, the concept of the special needs of landlocked developing countries — in particular the identification of those needs related to the issue of transit through other States, which also have legitimate rights and interests — cannot be separated from the general processes that I have described.

We particularly appreciate the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, as well as the work of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, which present a balanced and broad vision of the status of the issues that have brought us together today.

The priorities of the 2003 Programme of Action with respect to transit policy issues, infrastructure development and maintenance, international trade and trade facilitation, as well as international support measures, are all an integral part of Chile's foreign policy. Around these priorities, Chile's policies in the South American context have produced specific work programmes and actions with Bolivia and Paraguay.

With the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action it was necessary to define courses of action in the South American context. At the bilateral level an agenda is being developed with Bolivia within a broad, all-inclusive dialogue whose essential components include joint efforts to provide more efficient transit transport systems and swift, functional border controls; to cooperate to prevent smuggling; to harmonize environmental and public health programmes, especially with respect to dangerous cargoes; and to implement useful non-discriminatory regulatory frameworks, as well as to have the will to improve them.

Bilaterally with Bolivia, we have plans and working groups focused on achieving full complementarity between public and private operators involved in transit relationships. We have adopted the same approach with Paraguay.

Furthermore, as a result of agreements originating from Chile's association with the South American Common Market (MERCOSUR) for more than a decade, there are projects today that benefit all its members by giving access to the Pacific. As one of those members, Paraguay now has alternatives.

The Government of Chile has announced the grant of access by Bolivia to the port of Iquique, under the free transit regime that Bolivia enjoys under existing treaties. That is in addition to the current access to Arica and Antofagasta, which already handle a great deal of Bolivian freight. Moreover, the agreement on the pipeline connecting Bolivia to Arica continues to be implemented.

In 2004 a duty-free warehouse for freight coming from and going to Paraguay was set up, in implementation of a specific agreement already in force, consistent with the active processes of physical integration in which the countries concerned are participating.

Similar developments can also be seen in the cooperation policy of the Chilean International Cooperation Agency, which covers, among other things, the education, culture, health and poverty-reduction sectors.

Physical integration — in which are highlighted advances and deficiencies in matters of connectivity, the use of infrastructure, transport systems, applicable norms and the use of border crossings — has been an important basis for understanding the real world of relations between South American countries.

With regard to rail transport, my Government has developed actions designed to revitalize this means of communication with Bolivia, from the point of view of both the infrastructure and border crossings. Chile has earnestly cooperated in the process that I have described.

The Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA), which has been in place since 2000, is starting to bear fruit with respect to providing methodology for the prioritization of projects, their implementation and the consideration of their environmental sustainability.

Chile participates in a series of corridors, usable throughout the year, that are connected with the other countries of the Southern Cone. We want to enhance this process, with the support of international, regional and subregional financing agencies, within the framework of implementation of the Union of South American Nations so that there will be a convergence of the objectives and commitments of States at the bilateral and regional levels.

In strengthening this scenario, we also have to reflect the agreements implementing the Millennium Development Goals and the Almaty Programme of Action.

This convergence can be seen in the December 2007 agreement of the Presidents to give life to the central inter-oceanic corridor, involving Bolivia, Brazil and Chile, and joining Arica and Iquique in the process. The project results from the decision to combine physical integration with a process of equitable economic growth in the three countries, aiming to support trade flows and boldly facilitating the movement of people.

The projects set out should increase trade within the regions involved and have an impact on growth and employment, as well as improve knowledge of the peoples and quality of life, points that were highlighted by the President of the Republic of Chile when she signed the agreement.

While integration is a concept that begins with the construction of basic infrastructure, known as a kind of corridor, it becomes reality when it takes the form of specific initiatives, since there is no effective integration at the margin of neighbouring countries. In South America, both Bolivia and Paraguay are seen as fundamental players in this process, so that any integration with respect to the Almaty Programme of Action must actively include them.

These matters cannot be separated from the debate on major issues of international trade, of goods and services, in which it should be agreed that landlocked developing countries must fully enjoy the benefits to be derived from international agreements and market access. They must also overcome the disadvantages they experience as a result of their geographical location and lesser development.

We agree on enhancing the contribution that the multilateral trading system can make to the effectiveness of freedom of transit, exercised in a non-discriminatory fashion, subject to speedy, transparent mechanisms, bearing in mind the specific circumstances and appropriate legal frameworks for passage through third countries, especially with regard to environmental and health matters.

The task for transit developing countries is therefore considerable. We support the reforms and specific measures designed to simplify procedures and formalities so that they are not obstacles to relations with landlocked developing countries, but become effective instruments of cooperation.

It is the responsibility of international organizations to support that process. It is up to our Governments to provide the proper mandates to strengthen the capacities of transit and landlocked developing countries in advancing this partnership process and the provision of adequate infrastructure.

The year 2015 is on the horizon, and my country wishes to reach it having developed responses to comply with the objectives and guidelines of the Almaty Declaration.

We therefore support the midterm review outcome document and the commitments resulting from the policies it sets out, and we join in the general agreement on this matter.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ts'ele Chakela, Minister of Public Works and Transport of the Kingdom of Lesotho.

Mr. Chakela (Lesotho): It is a great honour and pleasure to have this opportunity to say a few words on the Almaty Programme of Action.

As we look back on the five years since the Programme of Action was adopted in Kazakhstan in 2003, I invite all those present to applaud ourselves for a visionary programme of action that has set the tone for the development of our geographically disadvantaged countries. I am very proud to have been part of the process that led to its adoption, including the last preparatory meeting, which was held here.

Mr. Wolfe (Jamaica), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Programme of Action has seven objectives and five policy priority areas — transit policy and regulatory framework, infrastructure development, trade and transport facilitation, development assistance and implementation review — against which our progress can be measured.

It is indeed a daunting challenge, which can only be met through solidarity and cooperation with regional and international communities. In this connection, I shall refer to some of the initiatives Lesotho has undertaken.

I wish to reiterate some of the points I raised in 2007 at Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, where I gave an account of the strides we have made and our transport sector plans.

Under their Joint Bilateral Commission of Cooperation, the Governments of the Republic of South Africa and the Kingdom of Lesotho have agreed to establish a one-stop border post aimed at facilitating rapid movement of goods, services and people between the two countries and thereby improving trade and accelerating economic growth.

The Government of Lesotho plans to invite the private sector to express interest in the development of the Maseru container terminal into a dry port. This is in keeping with the regional standards of the Southern African Development Community as well as the need to expand and improve the transportation of goods through rail.

The Government of Lesotho is in the process of replacing the obsolete navigational aids at the Moshoeshoe I International Airport. Improvements include the procurement of fire trucks to further improve the safety standards of the airport. These activities are carried out through the assistance of the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa.

The European Union has assisted the Government of Lesotho to rehabilitate 110 kilometres of paved roads covering southern and northern parts of Lesotho. We are at the final stages of creating a roads directorate that will have functional autonomy to fine-tune our implementation strategies.

We encourage our women to become technicians and engineers; at one point the ratio of female engineers to male engineers at our Department of Rural Roads was in favour of females. Our Road Fund is a second-generation fund whose governance structures are in keeping with modern governance regimes.

However, amid these promising strides, we note with concern that some development partners are now focusing their financial assistance on the social sector. The interconnection of all sectors of the economy is a step in the right direction towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

We welcome the idea of aid-for-trade, which is supposed to assist us in addressing infrastructural challenges, and we are hopeful that it will soon be made operational, as it has been on the drawing board for too long.

In conclusion, I call on the development partners to honour their commitment and redouble their efforts towards providing financial assistance to landlocked and developing countries in order to enable them to compete globally.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Shukuru Kawambwa,

Minister for Infrastructure Development of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Kawambwa (United Republic of Tanzania): I wish to thank the President for convening this important high-level meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action, which the Assembly endorsed five years ago. Periodic review of the Programme's implementation permits necessary adjustments to ensure achievement of the agreed goals and targets.

In Almaty, Kazakhstan, in 2003, and then in subsequent consultations in the General Assembly, the international community recognized that high transit transport costs represented a more obstructive barrier than most favoured nation tariffs for landlocked developing countries. It has also been recognized that both transit and landlocked developing countries face enormous challenges in effectively participating in international trade.

Tanzania is very much aware of the challenges of lack of territorial access to the sea, remoteness and isolation from world markets faced by landlocked countries, and it has made concerted efforts in implementing the specific actions agreed upon in the Almaty Programme of Action.

We responded by preparing a country plan of action to be implemented by 2010. The plan has been linked to the Tanzania Development Vision 2025, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and currently the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty.

Allow me to describe the participation of Tanzania in the Almaty Programme of Action since 2003.

First, the transport sector is one of the crucial lead sectors required to address the remoteness of landlocked countries. Tanzania's geographical position gives transport infrastructure and services an important role in facilitating regional and international trade to six bordering landlocked countries.

Therefore, the policy objective on transport infrastructure development and services is to ensure that all roads, railways, seaports and inland ports serving landlocked neighbouring countries are expanded and improved to facilitate an adequate flow of international traffic to and from those countries.

Secondly, Tanzania's current transport infrastructure covers road, railway, air, water and pipeline routes linked to neighbouring landlocked and transit countries. The total road network length is 85,515 kilometres, which includes trunk and regional roads. The total length of the railway system is 3,676 kilometres. The central line, measuring 2,706 kilometres, will be linked to the three landlocked countries of Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda, with links to two other landlocked countries.

We have three major sea ports — Dar es Salaam, Tanga and Mtwara — and several inland water ports.

There are also four international airports and a pipeline spanning 1,750 kilometres used to transport crude oil from Dar es Salaam to the Ndola refinery in Zambia. A 232-kilometre pipeline to transport natural gas is foreseen to be linked to neighbouring countries in the near future.

Despite the considerable road and rail network, the transport infrastructure is still inadequate. In order to address the shortcomings and to achieve sustained development of the sector, a national transport policy was adopted in 2003. The policy covers all areas of the transport sector necessary for the achievement of national social and economic goals.

The vision of the transport sector is to have safe and efficient transport services for all by 2025. The strategy is to enhance modal integration, development of transport corridors and enhancement of a multimodal transport system, with particular emphasis on safety, environment, security and access for local use as well as for neighbouring landlocked countries.

In 2007-2008 our Government launched a 10-year transport sector investment programme, with a budget of $6.2 billion for the first five years, with a view to attaining improvements in transport infrastructure and services.

Recently Tanzania negotiated Millennium Challenge Account resources and was granted a total of $698 million, a five-year grant by the United States intended to reduce poverty, stimulate economic growth and increase household incomes through targeted infrastructure investments in transport, energy, and water.

Under that grant, $373 million was allocated to transport infrastructure, targeting transit facilitation in linking landlocked neighbouring countries to the

seaports of Mtwara, Dar es Salaam and Tanga. Those initiatives are in line with the requirements of both the Almaty Declaration and its Programme of Action.

Ports are also critical infrastructure for facilitating the Almaty Programme of Action. Therefore, the Tanzania Ports Authority is about to finalize a study on port interface challenges at the port of Dar es Salaam. Those challenges include, first, improving port operation services; secondly, synergizing key transport providers and enhancing the efficiency of the port and its trade facilitation with landlocked countries; thirdly, digitizing the customs process and fast-tracking tax-compliant customers; and, fourthly, reducing congestion at the port of Dar es Salaam and bringing the Tanga and Mtwara ports up to the required international standards.

Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi, through the African Development Bank, are carrying out a railway feasibility study on linking the three countries. The sector objective of the project is to contribute to the implementation of an efficient common multinational multimodal transport programme that fosters regional economic integration and the development of zones with high agriculture, mining, industrial or commercial potentials within those countries. This railway development will give landlocked countries access to international transport links.

To improve railway services in the central development corridor a public-private partnership arrangement is being considered. The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania has finalized the restructuring of the Tanzania Railways Corporation through a joint venture with RITES Ltd of India. It is expected that that new initiative will improve the efficiency of the central development corridor, which connects the landlocked countries of Rwanda and Burundi. The same approach is being worked out for Zambia through the Tanzania Zambia Railways Authority (TAZARA).

In implementing the Almaty Declaration, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have signed an agreement on the establishment of a central corridor transit transport facilitation agency to promote efficient transit transport systems and their maintenance over time, in the interests of all contracting parties, with a view to improving the accessibility and reliability of the central corridor.

According to the transport component of a World Bank study entitled "Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostic", dealing with roads, railways, ports, airports and urban transport, it is estimated that Tanzania will need to invest at least $12,989 million in order to meet the basic scenario — establishing accessibility standards applicable to developed and middle-income developing countries — in a way that will increase the competitiveness of Tanzania's economy and improve social cohesiveness.

Therefore, the total investment of about $6 billion over five years by Tanzania's transport sector investment programme is only 46 per cent of the investment required, which implies that Tanzania will have to sustain that level of investment over the next 10 to 15 years to be able to meet the basic scenario objectives.

Furthermore, the report noted that Tanzania will need to spend at least 8.4 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) to sustain that level of investment. Consequently, the Government wishes to invite the private sector to increase its level of investment in the transport sector, as the study recommended that the Government can afford to invest in the transport sector only 8.4 per cent of GDP, which is equivalent to $158 million annually.

In conclusion, Tanzania believes that efforts to implement the Almaty Programme of Action will require an effective partnership between transit and landlocked countries, on the one hand, and a global partnership between various international stakeholders, on the other. That approach will provide mutual benefits for all parties, as more effective participation in regional and international trade will enable the economies in question to benefit from economies of scale.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yukio Takasu, chairman of the delegation of Japan.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I have the greatest pleasure, as the representative of Japan and as a facilitator, to speak at the high-level midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Japan has consistently advocated the importance of ownership and partnership as the backbone of development. Under that principle, a developing country establishes its own priorities, direction and

strategy for development and strives to realize those objectives in a spirit of ownership.

Developing countries should take primary responsibility for their development, but their efforts should be complemented by strong and sustained commitments from their global partners. That philosophy is well embodied in the Almaty Programme of Action and should provide guidance in implementation.

Since the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action, many landlocked developing countries have shown steady progress in terms of expanding their gross domestic product and attracting foreign direct investment. That achievement has been made possible above all by the self-help efforts of landlocked developing countries, for which Japan expresses its highest respect. But it should be stressed that progress has been achieved also through their cooperation with transit developing countries, as well as partnerships with donor countries and international organizations. At the same time, we should be mindful that, as the report of the Secretary-General notes, much remains to be done to effectively implement the Almaty Programme of Action.

For the overall economic development of landlocked developing countries, the promotion of exports and the importation of essential goods at competitive prices are of the utmost importance. Being geographically disadvantaged, landlocked developing countries must make infrastructure improvement a priority. Only with the development of appropriate infrastructure can economic activities be accelerated and trade and investment promoted.

I would like to share with the Assembly some examples of Japan's partnership in those matters in different regions.

I begin with Africa, where many landlocked developing countries are located. Those countries are particularly affected by high transportation costs and weak infrastructure. It is necessary to narrow the distance between landlocked developing countries and world markets by improving power and transportation infrastructure and by connecting missing links in road networks throughout Africa, as well as improving the port facilities of transit countries.

With that in mind, Japan has taken the initiative to support the implementation of the Infrastructure Short-Term Action Plan of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), as well as other medium- and long-term infrastructure development programmes in Africa.

First, this year Japan hosted in Tokyo the fourth meeting of the Infrastructure Consortium for Africa (ICA). Then, in May, Japan co-hosted the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV), in cooperation with the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank.

The Conference emphasized the need to focus on the development of a region-wide infrastructure. It is gratifying that there was finally also consensus among all participants that every effort should be made to strengthen cooperation to promote the development of road networks, ports and power infrastructure as an engine for growth, using ICA as the platform.

Moreover, Japan pledged up to $4 billion of soft loans to Africa over the next five years, to give momentum to regional infrastructure improvement projects so as to attract the private investment necessary for Africa's economic growth.

On the same occasion, the World Bank and the African Development Bank announced that they would extend financing, in the order of $5 billion per year, for the development of transport corridors and power networks during the same five-year period. That was a result of a TICAD IV initiative.

The improvement of transportation infrastructure should not be limited to physical infrastructure. Institutional infrastructure, such as customs, quarantine and immigration procedures at borders, needs to be improved as well.

Japan extends assistance through the Japan International Cooperation Agency to establish one-stop border posts, which will enable the necessary border procedures to be completed at one stop. For example, Japan has been supporting the establishment of a one-stop border post on the Chirundu Bridge between Zambia and Zimbabwe through various forms of assistance, including the establishment of a legal framework, staff training and the construction of bridges and other border facilities. At the Fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development, Japan announced that it would extend such assistance for 14 other border posts in Africa.

However, infrastructure improvements alone cannot increase trade and investment. There need to be strong Government efforts to improve the investment climate to attract the private sector.

Japan pledged at the Conference, as its commitment to international trade and trade facilitation, that it would support efforts to double investment from Japan to Africa. To follow up that commitment, we recently sent several joint public-private sector missions with a view to promoting trade and investment in a number of African countries, including landlocked developing countries such as Uganda, Botswana and Ethiopia.

To make our relations with least developed countries in Africa even stronger, we are opening a number of embassies — this year in Mali, Botswana and Malawi, and next year in Burkina Faso.

Japan's support for landlocked and transit developing countries goes beyond the African continent, of course. We are also very active in other parts of the world in promoting regional cooperation and integration, which are indispensable for the development of landlocked developing countries and transit countries. Our consistent support for the Asian highway project through the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific is well known. Also, countries in the Mekong region are working together on regional integration within three major corridors running east to west and north to south.

In December 2006, with our assistance, the Second Mekong International Bridge, which links Thailand with Laos, was opened, making the east-west corridor almost complete. Early this year we also pledged $20 million to facilitate the trade in commodities using that corridor.

I shall name a few examples of recent support for other landlocked developing and transit countries. Over the past five to six years we have provided Afghanistan with more than $2.5 billion for infrastructure projects, including an airport and major roads. We have also started helping with the construction of an international airport in Mongolia, helped lay a railway network in Uzbekistan, and contributed to building or improving roads, bridges and tunnels in countries such as Tajikistan, Pakistan, Nepal and Bolivia. In Central Asia, we have also sent experts on road administration and provided equipment for customs control facilities.

When we look at what many Asian countries, including our own, have experienced in recent years, we see that trade promotion clearly makes significant contributions to economic growth. It is therefore important to consider development assistance from the viewpoint of how trade is promoted.

With that in mind, since 2005 Japan has been implementing the Development Initiative for Trade, whose purpose is to operationalize Aid for Trade. The initiative aims at assisting developing countries to acquire export capacity and to further benefit from the global trading system. We will continue to provide landlocked and transit countries with assistance to facilitate trade promotion.

Many landlocked countries also face major challenges in the area of climate change adaptation, including forest degradation and desertification. In that regard, Japan has established the Cool Earth Partnership to support developing countries that are trying to achieve economic growth while reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. We have pledged $10 billion under that initiative, to be disbursed over the next five years.

We collaborate closely with international organizations, including United Nations organizations, to support the adaptation efforts of developing countries that are most vulnerable to climate change. As part of that initiative, earlier this year we supported the establishment of the Japan-United Nations Development Programme joint framework for building partnerships to address climate change in Africa, under which we very much welcome concrete project proposals for implementation.

In the informal negotiations prior to this high-level meeting, we conducted a review of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action. Through that process, representatives of landlocked developing countries clearly demonstrated a sense of primary responsibility for their development. Cooperation with transit developing countries, donors and international organizations is vital for that development.

We make the utmost effort to strike a balance between the needs of landlocked developing countries and cooperation with transit developing countries. I firmly believe that the draft declaration agreed upon based on those considerations has tremendous value in enabling those countries to further integrate themselves

into the global economy, and thereby benefit from access to the world market.

For the negotiations on the outcome document for this review meeting, as was the case when the Almaty Programme of Action was negotiated five years ago, Japan had the honour to serve as a facilitator. The draft outcome document, which is now appropriately titled a declaration, was successfully agreed upon three weeks before today's meeting. That achievement was made possible through the cooperation of all those concerned.

I take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation to all for their understanding and cooperation. In particular, the invaluable contributions of High Representative Ambassador Diarra and his colleagues are greatly appreciated.

The achievement is also solid proof that the international community has been united in its support for landlocked and transit developing countries. Let us demonstrate the same spirit of cooperation in the next five years to faithfully implement the Almaty Programme of Action and the recommendations contained in the draft declaration on the midterm review, to be adopted tomorrow.

The Assembly may rest assured that Japan is determined to make every possible effort to help achieve the objectives, as a strong partner that landlocked and transit developing countries can have full confidence in.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. John W. Ashe, chairman of the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda.

Mr. Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda): The Group of 77 and China welcome the convening of this high-level meeting to conduct a midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action.

The Programme provides a comprehensive framework to address the particular needs and problems of landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and transit developing countries. The time for the review is indeed opportune, given the looming 2015 deadline for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Last week's high-level event of the General Assembly made it clear that we are not on track to achieve most, if any, of the MDGs. Landlocked developing countries are among those least likely to meet the Goals.

The Group attach great importance to high-level reviews of the implementation of the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits. It is the means through which we can monitor progress in the implementation necessary to achieve the objectives.

The Group believe that the overall internationally agreed development goals and targets can only be realized through continued focus on the special needs of the most vulnerable countries. The Almaty Programme of Action remains a sound global framework for global partnerships aimed at addressing the special needs of the LLDCs. Its full implementation should be vigorously pursued.

During this two-day meeting, as the international community takes stock of progress made, lessons learned and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action to date, the Group of 77 and China hope that one result will be greater support for the efforts of the LLDCs and transit developing countries in their efforts to address the major constraints on their development. In this regard, the five priority areas agreed upon in the Programme of Action are critical.

In this increasingly competitive globalized world, trade is a vital means of international economic integration, and it is in this area that the LLDCs are at the greatest disadvantage. Therefore, the failure of the Doha Development Round to address the development challenge in international trade is of great relevance to the situation of the LLDCs.

In that context, the Group of 77 and China would like to highlight the following points.

First, the current multidimensional global crises — food, energy, climate and finance — will compound the challenges to the development objectives of the LLDCs and transit developing countries, and will constrain national efforts to achieve implementation of the Programme.

Secondly, a robust and proactive initiative, including a doubling of efforts and resources on the part of all development partners in support of the LLDCs will be required.

Thirdly, greater progress in implementation is being impeded by the persistence of long-standing

barriers to development, such as international trade barriers, lack of resources for investing in infrastructure and weak international support measures.

The Group of 77 and China is now more convinced than ever that a supportive international trading system is vital for the LLDCs, and that full implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action is both critical and urgent.

The Group emphasize the need for initiatives, including aid for trade initiatives, which aim to lower the administrative, financial and other costs to trade and to improve competitiveness and enhance productive capacity.

The Group also emphasize the need for enhanced support from development partners for building and developing the capacity of LLDCs in World Trade Organization negotiations on trade facilitation, so as to enhance their ability to take advantage of any greater market access opportunities.

The Group is concerned that LLDCs, like most developing countries, continue to be at a competitive disadvantage in attracting private investment despite creating a more attractive investment climate through reforms and policy improvements to reduce bureaucracy, lower costs and improve business procedures and public services.

There is a need, therefore, for conscious policy measures to facilitate and enhance the flow of investments, both public and private, in LLDCs in pursuit of the full implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Furthermore, bilateral development partners and multilateral institutions, including development banks and agencies, should redouble their efforts to encourage and facilitate public and private investment in transit and transport infrastructure development in LLDCs through innovative means, including investment guarantees.

The Group of 77 and China wish to draw attention to the following points.

First, there is a need for greater access to advanced technologies in transport systems, services and technologies that can improve product quality.

Secondly, there is a need for sufficient and predictable levels of official development assistance (ODA). This will require in the first instance that developed countries deliver on their commitments to provide 0.15 per cent to 0.20 per cent of gross national income as ODA to the LLDCs. In this regard, the Group strongly supports the call of the Secretary-General to donor countries and the international financial and development institutions to support the Trust Fund he established for the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

The third need is for technical assistance, including the facilitation of South-South cooperation, in the construction, maintenance and operations of transport, storage and other transit-related facilities, as well as the promotion of subregional, regional and interregional transport-related programmes and projects.

The Group of 77 and China welcome the efforts of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States in compiling a set of macroeconomic indicators, including selected transport and communications statistics, to illustrate progress in implementing the Almaty Programme of Action. We urge that this initiative be further enhanced to also include the development of an acceptable set of benchmarks, in addition to the macroeconomic indicators, in order to effectively monitor implementation.

In conclusion, we emphasize that progress in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action is integral to the implementation of all the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits, including the Millennium Declaration. It is a test of our resolve to foster a global partnership for development in our efforts to track progress of all internationally agreed development goals.

The Group of 77 and China sincerely hope that this high-level review meeting will increase the sense of urgency and renew and scale up global partnerships in support of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, and, more generally, support for the development efforts of LLDCs to achieve their national development goals in concrete, tangible and measurable ways.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Philippe Delacroix, the representative of France.

Mr. Delacroix (France) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries of Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia, align themselves with this statement.

First, I thank the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General and the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States for organizing this plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action.

The European Union also thanks Mr. Yukio Takasu, Permanent Representative of Japan, for facilitating negotiations on the draft final document (A/63/L.3*), which were concluded last month. I also thank the Secretary-General for his most recent report (A/63/165).

The Almaty Programme of Action is built on a partnership among landlocked and transit countries and development partners. In that spirit of partnership, the European Union would like to reaffirm before the General Assembly its commitment to promoting and implementing the priorities set forth in the Almaty Programme of Action.

The European Union is satisfied with the final document, which we approved. It is balanced and comprehensive and will lead to concrete recommendations within the framework already established by the Almaty Programme of Action. Before I address a few points that the European Union considers to be essential to ensuring development in landlocked and transit countries, I should like first to express the Union's satisfaction with the progress achieved over the past five years. Generally speaking, landlocked developing countries have been enjoying higher gross national products and foreign direct investment. For many of those countries, such progress is encouraging. I wish to stress three points in particular.

First, with respect to infrastructure, as many speakers have noted, landlocked developing countries are subject to major constraints related to development and infrastructure maintenance problems. The European Union plays a key role in that sphere by providing financial and technical assistance for developing transport, telecommunications, energy and water infrastructures. Last year, the European Union endorsed the EU-Africa Infrastructure Partnership with the aim of promoting interconnectivity in Africa, in particular in favour of the landlocked countries of that continent.

Official development assistance naturally plays an important role in remedying the lack of infrastructure. However, the private sector also plays a decisive role in financing such infrastructure, be it in landlocked or transit countries. In that respect, it is essential to promote public-private partnerships, especially by creating an investment-friendly environment.

Secondly, such infrastructure investments facilitate trade expansion. Customs bottlenecks must not slow expanding trade. Lowering customs barriers and modernizing existing customs procedures naturally encourages trade. Landlocked and transit countries should work together to ensure that red tape does not hinder trade and investment. We would recall that, as the World Bank has noted, only a quarter of the delays in the exchange of goods is due to poor infrastructure quality and that paperwork, inspections and customs formalities — in short, regulatory constraints — are the main causes of logjams and delays.

That is why the European Union is funding several customs modernization projects in landlocked developing countries. The European Union is also one of the main trading partners of the group of developing landlocked countries. In that context, it finances several trade facilitation projects in landlocked developing countries.

Thirdly, with regard to regional integration, those countries must develop through regional cooperation and integration channels. Developing landlocked and transit countries that belong to dynamic regional organizations clearly attract more foreign direct investment and integrate more efficiently into regional transport and transit infrastructure networks. The European Union provides an example of regional integration that has contributed to the economic expansion of several of its landlocked member States. Other examples — such as those of the Economic Community of West African States or the Greater

Mekong subregion — show why it is worthwhile to strengthen that level of cooperation.

The European Union shall do its share of the work to implement those various points. However, landlocked or transit countries are primarily responsible for their own development. To that end, they must unite and work together for their common development. The European Union welcomes their willingness to assume that responsibility, as demonstrated by the declaration we are preparing to adopt. In their endeavour, they can count on the active partnership of the European Union.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Ms. Raja Ghannam, Director General of Multilateral Cooperation of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Morocco.

Ms. Ghannam (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The delegation of Morocco welcomes the convening of this high-level plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. We congratulate Cheikh Sidi Diarra on his outstanding work and tireless efforts to ensure the success of this meeting and to defend the interests of landlocked developing countries. My delegation welcomes the mobilization that took place during the preparations for this meeting and believes that the active participation of all stakeholders in that collective effort demonstrates that the needs of landlocked countries remain a major concern on the global development agenda.

The Moroccan delegation firmly believes in the importance of the midterm review, which will allow us to assess the progress that has been made in implementing the Almaty Programme of Action and to agree on efforts to further mobilize global partnerships to help landlocked and transit developing countries as they strive to achieve economic and social development. The outcome of the review process will certainly contribute to progress in the debate on a road map for the years ahead so that we can build on earlier efforts to meet the specific needs of the affected countries and to ensure an updated transport cooperation framework for those countries.

This high-level meeting takes place in a context that is particularly difficult for landlocked developing countries, which are encountering numerous challenges to their development. The implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action will undoubtedly help them to meet those challenges. Landlocked countries are aware of the need to promote a policy of genuine domestic and external openness, which is critical to their economic development. To that end, they have established road infrastructure programmes to connect their communications networks at the subregional and regional levels, encourage the circulation of goods and services, and promote business opportunities.

However, the failure of the World Trade Organization trade negotiations will seriously affect the hopes of those countries with respect to market access. The failure represents yet another lost opportunity for those countries to promote their exports. Similarly, in addition to the structural handicaps impeding their economic and social development policies, like other countries of the South landlocked countries are dealing with the effects of climate change, the skyrocketing costs of energy and food, and the international financial crisis.

The international community must enhance its support for landlocked and transit countries, meet their needs in terms of market access, and provide them with additional financial resources so that they can meet those challenges and achieve the objectives of the Almaty Programme of Action, the implementation of which will require the activation of global development partnerships.

As a faithful promoter of South-South cooperation, Morocco is ready to share its own expertise and know-how in the implementation of the infrastructure projects necessary to accelerating the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action. During the course of various international conferences held in Morocco — notably the Ministerial Conference of Least Developed Countries and the High-Level Conference on South-South Cooperation — my country has drawn attention to the specific needs of those countries and the necessity of partnerships between landlocked developing countries, donor countries, the international financial institutions and the private sector.

The Moroccan delegation remains convinced that the recommendations of our meeting will speed up

implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action and give a strong impetus to development efforts in various regions of the countries concerned.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Baki İlkin, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Turkey.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): It gives me pleasure to address the General Assembly on the occasion of the high-level meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. I take the opportunity to share some of our views on this important topic.

It is clear that the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) still face serious challenges today. And those challenges are not limited to the geographical and physical constraints; the LLDCs also face certain structural inadequacies. Although these shortcomings do not fully define all the socio-economic development problems of the LLDCs, they still undermine their economic growth.

The Almaty Programme of Action provides a solid framework for international cooperation aimed at addressing the challenges faced by the LLDCs. There has already been considerable progress in implementing the Programme's priority areas. Yet we have to continue our collective efforts to create genuine partnerships between the landlocked and transit countries through regional integration schemes.

Another important dimension in that regard is promoting closer cooperation between the LLDCs and their development partners, which will pave the way for transport infrastructure development, trade facilitation and market access.

The economic development and growth of the LLDCs on the whole has been promising since the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action. However, rising transport costs and persistent structural issues have the potential to slow down that positive trend.

Let me briefly elaborate on how Turkey plays its part to address the challenges that the LLDCs face.

In the dictionary of development, "bridge" has a number of meanings. In the case of Turkey, the notion of being a bridge has first a geographical connotation. The Anatolian peninsula has been at the epicentre of major trade routes. Starting with the historic Silk Road, Turkey has always been a conduit of close regional transport cooperation and thus trade promotion. That is still very much the case.

We all know that international trade serves as a powerful engine for development. That applies to all nations, but is certainly vital for landlocked countries. Mindful of this fact, Turkey has committed itself to the facilitation of transport links between the landlocked countries of Asia and their trading partners in Europe. Indeed, with the realization of two railway construction projects, the rail link between Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia will have been completed.

Because of its unique geographical location, Turkey is also one of the few countries that are members of both the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. These two important United Nations bodies have joined forces to harmonize and eventually link the transport networks of two of the most populous continents. Turkey has worked proactively for this historic project to become a reality.

In that framework, Turkey is party to the Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, the Trans-European North-South Motorway network project and the Trans-European Railway Project, and it is currently negotiating for the extension of the Trans-European Transport Networks to its own territory. Completion of those projects would further facilitate the access of landlocked countries to their important trading partners.

However, the provision of transport facilities is only one dimension of the problems that the LLDCs face. The landlocked developing countries need to further upgrade their transport networks and related infrastructure too. Here Turkey again plays a role. Through the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency, Turkey has in the last three years either directly undertaken or partly financed multiple transport infrastructure projects at a cost totalling $19 million. We have also been providing various training and education programmes for experts from the Central Asian republics.

I am pleased to announce today the Turkish Government's decision to contribute $200,000 to the Trust Fund established to facilitate the follow-up activities for the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Our collective efforts to address the special needs and problems of the LLDCs are indeed vital for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. We will continue to do our utmost in assisting the LLDCs in their development endeavours.

In conclusion, I extend our warm thanks to the Permanent Representative of Japan, Ambassador Takasu, for his diligent work as facilitator in the negotiation process of the declaration that will be formally adopted at the end of our meeting.

I also express our deep appreciation to Under-Secretary-General and High Representative Ambassador Diarra and his team for their tireless work.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. R.M. Marty M. Natalegawa, chair .an of the delegation of the Republic of Indonesia.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): I begin by thanking the President for convening this midterm review to address the special needs of landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and their transit developing countries.

The review takes places at an important juncture, when Member States have reiterated their firm commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The 31 countries comprising 370 million people that we speak of today are an essential element of our broader commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. This is therefore a timely opportunity to acknowledge the progress achieved but also to highlight the remaining challenges.

The declaration to be adopted at the end of the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action contains important future actions to enhance further cooperation between landlocked and transit countries, with the support of the international community. In that regard, my delegation expresses its full support for the declaration's adoption.

Indonesia recognizes the special needs of the least developed and landlocked developing countries. The high cost of international trade caused by transit and transport costs has been a persistent barrier. Even since the world market was fully opened to landlocked countries, their participation in international trade and the competitiveness of their products have been hampered by lack of territorial access to sea ports and poor transit infrastructure. The limited capacity of the infrastructure, even with territorial access to sea ports, is another challenge.

Trade is a powerful engine for growth and development. Therefore, the participation and integration of landlocked developing countries in the world trading system should be at the centre of global efforts. The full inclusion of the least developed countries and LLDCs in the World Trade Organization will address their marginalization in international trade.

Since the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action, the gross domestic product of the landlocked developing countries as a group grew by almost 8 per cent per annum for the period 2003 to 2006. The increased GDP growth rates resulting from exports surged particularly for oil and other mineral resources. Moreover, the economic growth of the major transit countries has been encouraging, and neighbouring landlocked developing countries have benefited from the spillover effects.

Despite those encouraging signs, however, the economic growth and social well-being of landlocked countries remain very vulnerable to external shocks. That causes even more concern as the per capita income and human development of most of the LLDCs are among the lowest in the world.

Therefore, providing international support measures is an urgent task that includes a major effort to reduce transport costs, improve infrastructure and strengthen capacity-building. Since cooperation between landlocked countries and their transit neighbours is pivotal for an effective solution to many transit problems, an effective strategy to improve transit systems requires, first and foremost, action at the regional level.

Within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Initiative for ASEAN Integration Programme gives direction to and sharpens the focus of collective efforts in ASEAN to narrow the development gap between its older and newer members. The initiative also aims to merge the economy of ASEAN's newer members into the regional and global markets.

To realize that objective, at their summit meeting in Phnom Penh in November 2002 the ASEAN leaders endorsed a workplan for the period to 2008 comprising 203 projects. It is noteworthy that some of the projects,

especially those related to transportation, are in line with the Almaty Programme of Action.

Indonesia joins those who have called for international support to address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and the transit developing countries. Indonesia reiterates its determination to work in unison with the international community to create an environment that will pave the way towards promoting the well-being of all countries.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Eladio Loizaga, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Paraguay.

Mr. Loizaga (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of Paraguay I would like to say how pleased we are that Mr. d'Escoto Brockmann is presiding over this high-level plenary devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action, knowing that he comes from one of the three vulnerable groups of this Organization.

I recall that during its eleventh session the General Assembly, in February 1957, adopted resolution 1028 (XI), in which Member States for the first time gave

> "full recognition to the needs of land-locked Member states in the matter of transit trade and, therefore, [accorded] them adequate facilities in terms of international law and practice in this regard, bearing in mind the future requirements resulting from the economic development of the land-locked countries".

After 46 years and subsequent technical meetings, the Almaty Programme of Action was adopted in August 2003, with a view to addressing the special needs of landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) within a new global framework for transit transportation cooperation for landlocked and transit developing countries.

The Almaty Declaration, which systematized the special needs of the Group of the Landlocked Developing Countries, was the result of intense negotiations and, above all, a response to the call made by our heads of State in Goal 8 of the Millennium Declaration, in which they recognized the special needs and problems that that Group faces owing to its vulnerable geographical position. It was also possible thanks to the support and understanding shown by our brother transit countries.

We are convinced that the Almaty Programme of Action represents the necessary framework to build fairer and more equitable relations between all the Member States and international financial and development agencies, with the aim of helping overcome that disadvantage in such a way that we can participate in and share the benefits to be gained from having access to the main world markets, as well as the growing globalized and competitive economy.

At the Almaty Conference in 2003, with a view to uniting efforts to tackle the challenges faced by the Group of the LLDCs in future trade negotiations, Paraguay was appointed coordinator of the Group for matters relating to trade and development. In keeping with that mandate, the Paraguayan delegation in Geneva has been working within both the framework of Goal 8 of the Millennium Declaration and the World Trade Organization (WTO) to incorporate and defend the interests of the Group in multilateral international trade.

Similarly, in the framework of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Group of the LLDCs played an active role in the latest conferences, in particular in UNCTAD XI, which took place in São Paulo, Brazil, in June 2004, and in the recent UNCTAD XII, held in Accra, Ghana, from 20 to 25 April 2008, where there was major recognition of the need to take into account the position of the landlocked developing countries in international trade and other priority areas.

In the preparation for that recent Conference, within the framework of the Group of 77 and China, the Group of the LLDCs submitted several paragraphs related to questions of transportation, infrastructure, trade facilitation, investment, access to markets and technical cooperation, associated with the Almaty Programme of Action, which were included in the Accra Agreement and which the UNCTAD secretariat is currently implementing.

It is worth pointing out that for the first time UNCTAD has a mandate to assist landlocked countries in the area of investment. That has made it possible for UNCTAD, jointly with the World Bank and the United States Chamber of Commerce, to organize the High-Level Investment Forum "Investing in Landlocked Developing Countries", which took place in this Hall yesterday.

Within the framework of the WTO, negotiations are currently under way for the Doha Development Round, which began in 2001 and was expected to be completed by 2005. However, as we all know, the difficulties in fulfilling the mandate of the WTO Ministerial Conference have meant that negotiations are still going on.

In accordance with Priority 3 of the Almaty Programme of Action, on international trade and trade facilitation, the landlocked developing countries are focusing their efforts primarily on one of the most important chapters of the Doha Round, which is trade facilitation. It is expected that, as a result of the negotiations in that regard, the landlocked developing countries will be able to count on an international instrument that contains mandatory compliance standards and helps to remove obstacles that currently hinder trade and make it more costly, by facilitating the transit of merchandise and making it less expensive.

With a view to establishing a reference point for work in the Round, and also to have agreed common positions, we organized the first Meeting of the Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries Responsible for Trade, which took place in Asunción, Paraguay, in August 2005. As a result of the meeting, we adopted the Asunción Platform for the Doha Development Round, which is today a fundamental document in the area of trade and trade facilitation.

In August 2007, the second Meeting of the Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries Responsible for Trade was held in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, to review the Asunción Platform and adjust the objectives of the Group of the LLDCs to the Doha Round. Our efforts resulted in the Ulan Bator Declaration, in which our countries renewed their commitment to work with determination for real, beneficial results in the Doha Round.

Another important topic which landlocked developing countries have dealt with in the World Trade Organization (WTO) concerns the processes for their joining that body. Indeed, eight members of our Group are currently negotiating their entry. It is a long, costly and complicated process.

We take this opportunity to repeat our call to the members of the WTO to take into account in accession negotiations for the countries of our Group the condition of those countries, and not to request concessions going far beyond their economic, financial and development possibilities.

We also cannot miss the opportunity to point out that, in addition to the structural difficulties of transit transport, trade facilitation and restrictions on landlocked developing countries' access to international trade, there are today new challenges to sustainable development: the high oil price, the food crisis, climate change and, most recently, the financial crisis, which could have a great impact on the most vulnerable economies. It would therefore be prudent for the international community, in adopting policies and actions to deal with those crises, to bear in mind the particular situation of landlocked developing countries.

In accordance with the mandate given by the Group, and with its constant support, Paraguay has made all necessary efforts in coordinating negotiations for the draft declaration to be considered by ministers and representatives in this high-level meeting. The document reflects the state of implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action as well as the challenges to be met and commitments still to be fulfilled in the next five years.

I thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for the support that he has given the Group of the Landlocked Developing Countries since he took office in order to, above all, preserve and strengthen the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

I also pay a well-deserved tribute to Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, the first High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, for his dedication to the cause of our Group and his efforts in the establishment of the Almaty Programme of Action five years ago.

I also recognize the work done by the Permanent Representative of Japan, Ambassador Yukio Takasu, and his team. As facilitator, he managed to reconcile the different positions, which made it possible to agree on a draft declaration.

Lastly, we express our gratitude to the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Ambassador Cheick Sidi Diarra,

and his team of skilled professionals for their work, in accordance with the Assembly's mandate, both at the preparatory process and in the meeting for which we come together today.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hilario G. Davide, chairman of the delegation of the Philippines.

Mr. Davide (Philippines): Since I am speaking for the first time at the sixty-third session, I begin by congratulating the President on his truly well-deserved election by acclamation. With the theme of his stewardship clearly defined in his address at the opening of the session on 16 September, the Philippines is confident that he will provide that rare brand of leadership that promises to bring the dawn of a new day for the United Nations as it grapples with the series of crises that have engulfed our world.

Strengthened as the President is by his faith, I know that he will, just as St. Paul in Corinthians 1:16 exhorted, be courageous and strong and his every act will be done with love. In this spirit, the Philippines pledges its cooperation and full support in all his efforts to pursue his noble plans for the United Nations.

The Philippines likewise commends and congratulates Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his incisive and comprehensive report on the Almaty Programme of Action at the time of its midterm review.

Finally, I extend the Philippines gratitude to Ambassador Cheick Sidi Diarra, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, for his unceasing efforts to succeed in his multiple roles, especially in advancing the cause of those countries.

We also thank Ambassador Yukio Takasu of Japan for his crucial role in negotiating and facilitating the outcome document.

The Philippines aligns itself with the statement of the Group of 77 and China delivered by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda. Nonetheless, it wishes to speak briefly on some Philippine concerns.

It must immediately be stated that the review process provides an opportunity to make a critical examination of the accomplishments made and the challenges faced by landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries in addressing their respective development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and internationally agreed development goals.

Although the Philippines is not a landlocked country — it is an archipelago with 7,100 islands — the issue of access to markets by landlocked countries finds congruence in the challenges related to the Philippines, as its islands, big and small, separated by sometimes unfriendly water, similarly face problems in transport and infrastructure needs.

Admittedly, these challenges are not as complicated in terms of seeking third-country access for our products to be exported to wider global markets. However, the overarching objective of integration into the world economy through harmonization of policies and trade facilitation is a familiar topic of discussion in a similar grouping in which the Philippines is involved — the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

The similarity between the Almaty agenda topics of discussion and those of APEC pointed and led to the possibility of finding points of synergy, cooperation and mutual benefit. The global village is shrinking fast. Problems and crises in one country directly or indirectly affect the rest. The development, progress and stability of one country ought to benefit, directly or indirectly, the rest. In short, as has been said, no man can be an island entirely of himself.

This brings us to the conclusion that the logic and wisdom of global trade means looking beyond one's immediate geographic neighbours. Thus, Almaty's broader concerns must extend beyond access to the coasts. Even though the Almaty agenda is very much situated in the United Nations process — while APEC's is not — it clearly appears that if the topics of trade facilitation, policy harmonization, transit and infrastructure needs are of common interest, then there should be some advantage to a mutual awareness of discussions and best practices in each forum, especially since some APEC members are also Almaty transit countries.

This is not to advocate the establishment of any formal connection between the two forums. However, since knowledge is power and access to knowledge is free, there is no downside to being aware of information that can be useful or applicable to one's particular situation. In any event, the benefits derived from knowledge sharing are unquantifiable, and if in

the end this could lead to the process of a formal connection between the two forums, a new dimension of cooperation would be achieved for the summum bonum of all.

The Philippines supports the conclusions and recommendations in the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action. The special needs of landlocked developing countries should be recognized, and, as I stated earlier, and as recommended in the Secretary-General's report, there is a role to be played by regional and subregional organizations in the implementation.

In addition, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) report on emerging issues in the implementation of the Programme of Action provides a region-specific analysis of the existing challenges and efforts made in the five identified priority areas. Again, the efforts of ESCAP and the Economic Commission for Europe to provide technical expertise on paperless trade mirror similar discussions in APEC.

The current activities focusing on the needs of the landlocked developing countries give Member States an update on the remaining challenges as the LLDCs try to situate themselves in a world now hit on all sides by crises of unimaginable proportions: climate change, the food and energy crisis, and now the financial crisis, heightened by what seems to be a failure of the bailout strategy in the United States. Verily, the global financial markets are in the midst of upheaval, in grave turmoil. The future of the Doha Development Round remains uncertain. All these sad and unfortunate developments point to extremely difficult times, and, unfortunately, the LLDCs are placed in danger of being the most negatively affected.

Our discussions here today must take these ominous developments into account. We must work harder to ensure that the Millennium Development Goals are not put further out of reach of the LLDCs. We must learn to look at the broader picture, taking into account how regional and subregional discussions can integrate the needs of LLDCs and thereby come up with mutually beneficial policies for all stakeholders.

Finally, let me put on record that the Philippines will give full support and cooperation in seeking a common way forward for the expeditious realization of the goals of the Almaty grand agenda as we move beyond this midterm review.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Piragibe dos Santos Tarragô, the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Tarragô (Brazil): My delegation associates itself with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

I am grateful for the timely convening of this meeting to take stock of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, as mandated by resolution 62/204.

The Brazilian Government is deeply conscious of the importance of achieving the goals agreed to in Almaty, where we set ourselves a road map to guide our efforts in assisting the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) to overcome the main obstacles to their economic development, which, to a large extent, derive from their particular geographic situation.

In keeping with the Programme of Action, Brazil is committed to assisting, in particular, its landlocked neighbours — Paraguay and Bolivia — to carry out the actions identified in the five priorities. As a transit country, Brazil is ready to contribute to their realization, especially by seeking to facilitate the flow of trade of landlocked developing countries to and from international markets. With that in mind, Brazil has taken a number of initiatives over the years.

Together with our neighbours in the region, we signed in 1990 the Agreement on International Land Transportation, which provides the legal basis ensuring the transit of goods to and from the landlocked countries in our region. Thanks to that agreement, intense and dynamic transport flows have taken place ever since.

Political initiatives undertaken in our region might also contribute to the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action. In particular, the creation of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUL) represents an important step towards a strengthened regional integration that will foster closer relations among its members in various fields, including through the development of physical infrastructure projects. UNASUL has already created two working groups — one on regional infrastructure and the other on finance integration — which will benefit transit to and from landlocked countries in the region.

Brazil also maintains bilateral committees on trade monitoring with Bolivia and Paraguay, which constitute important instruments for trade enhancement. That is in addition to periodic meetings at the level of Deputy Foreign Ministers.

Financing is a key issue for the promotion of regional integration and for the development of landlocked countries. In order to ensure the viability of the numerous infrastructure projects, particular attention must be paid to risk-related mechanisms of the corresponding credit operations. In this respect, Brazil has been able to extend financing in support of infrastructure works, by means of specific export credit programmes and increased capital in regional financing institutions, such as the Andean Development Corporation.

On trade, Brazilian relations with Bolivia and Paraguay have improved in the current decade. Since 2002 two-way trade between Brazil and Bolivia has grown by more than 200 per cent, and between my country and Paraguay it has grown by roughly 100 per cent.

A substantial number of Brazilian companies have invested in those two neighbouring countries, in very diverse fields including agriculture, cattle breeding, agrochemicals, furniture, metallurgy, banking, fuel distribution, energy, textiles and clothing, and oil and gas exploration.

Likewise — and of no less importance — my Government supports the view that in the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization, landlocked developing countries should receive treatment that enables them to participate more fully in the multilateral trading system and to benefit from their integration into it.

With a view to reducing the existing asymmetries in the countries of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), Brazil supported the establishment of MERCOSUR's Structural Convergence Fund. Since its inception in 2006, the fund has already financed 13 development projects in Paraguay, amounting to $48 million, in areas such as housing, roads, credit for small enterprises, the development of technological capacity and improvements in animal health.

In addition, Brazil has committed financing support for important road projects in Bolivia that will improve domestic links and facilitate the transit of goods from Brazil to ports on the Pacific coast.

Brazil and Paraguay have agreed to build a new bridge over the Paraná River, thus easing the congestion that today hampers an increased flow of vehicles between the two countries and to the ports on the Atlantic coast.

Finally, through a series of bilateral and regional initiatives, Brazil has shown its commitment to the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, and it intends to continue to do so. We have been working together with partners in the region to create conditions that may facilitate the development of our landlocked neighbours and reduce the current disequilibria.

We believe that the trading, financing and transport benefits that we, transit countries, may be able to extend to our neighbouring landlocked countries will also wind up being advantageous to ourselves, as those benefits will have a positive impact on the development of our whole region.

Programme of work

Mr. Yáñez-Barnuevo (Spain), Vice-President, in the Chair.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to inform members that on Monday, 6 October, the General Assembly will take up, as the first item, the request by the Secretary-General (A/63/232), for the inclusion of an additional item in the agenda of the sixty-third session, namely, "Judges of the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991".

Thereafter the Assembly will consider agenda item 100, "Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization".

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.